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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003426

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SUBJECT: OAS AND EU EOMS SET, BUT PROSPECTS FOR ROBUST
ELECTION OBSERVATION BLEAK

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. The BRV's deliberate policy of delay has successfully impeded effective, impartial international observation of the December 3 presidential election. After receiving an invitation to observe in June, the EU was not able to sign an MOU with the National Electoral Council (CNE) until November 15 -- less than three weeks before the election. The Carter Center plans to send just a very small technical mission, assuming it can conclude its MOU with the CNE soon after. The OAS team is on the ground with a few people, but will not be joined by mission leader Jose Enrique Fischer, whose impartiality is already being widely questioned by the opposition, until at least November 18. The electoral observation missions (EOMs) have missed most of the key events in the electoral preparation process and have had to scale back their previously planned activities, effectively making it impossible that they will be able to mount a comprehensive and useful observation effort. End Summary.

EU Mission Coming Late

12. (C) Although the National Electoral Council (CNE) sent its invitation to the EU to observe the December 3 presidential election in June, the CNE dragged out MOU negotiations by seeking to restrict the ability of the EU EOM to issue opinions or make public its findings. EU Commission Ambassador signed an MOU with the CNE on November 15, only after the CNE backed off its unacceptable preconditions. European Commission First Secretary Denis Danilidis told Poloff November 14 that "CNE incompetence" compounded the delays. The EU EOM leader is expected to arrive in Caracas on November 15 or 16 -- two and a half weeks before the election -- along with 10 core team members. Thirty "long-term" observers will arrive the week of November 20, followed by 100 "short-term" observers the week before the elections. While EU observers hope to catch the end of the audits of the fingerprint machines, which began November 9, they have missed most audits and testing of the machines and software. Observers will focus on government intimidation of voters, particularly civil servants, and the reliability of the electronic voting process on election day.

OAS Arrives, Sort Of

13. (C) OAS EOM leader and former Uruguayan Ambassador to the OAS Jose Enrique Fischer is not scheduled to arrive in Caracas until the weekend of November 18, just two weeks before the election, according to OAS EOM Deputy Judith Lobos. Lobos told Poloff November 14 that while the OAS plans to field about 50 observers, many of the technical experts will not begin to arrive until after Fischer. The arrival of a number of EOM members has been delayed due to a lack of funding, she admitted. Without extra money the OAS may need to further scale back its EOM. The EOM will focus on monitoring the audits remaining for the fingerprint (digital scanning) machines, campaign abuses, distribution of election materials, as well as voting day procedures, including any electoral violence or intimidation.

14. (C) Outgoing OAS representative Carlos Carbacho told Poloff November 6 that he was pessimistic about the potential effectiveness of the OAS EOM. Carbacho said the mission would probably prove "quite toothless" since the agreement with the CNE prohibits the EOM from making public statements without prior vetting. Lobos later refuted this, saying the agreement adhered to the standards in the Democratic Charter, which do not allow for such control. The OAS's final EOM report is supposed to be presented via the Secretary General of the OAS Permanent Council, according to the same MOU. Carbacho also said EOM head Jose Enrique Fischer is a close friend of Venezuelan Vice Foreign Minister for North America and Multilateral Affairs (and former Ambassador to OAS) Jorge Valero, and is probably seen as a "safe pick" for the Bolivarians.

Carter Center Reduced to Almost Nothing

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15. (C) Carter Center's Hector Vanolli told Poloff November 14 that the Center expects to sign an MOU with the CNE soon after the MOU between the CNE and EU is signed on November 15. Vanolli also blamed the delay on "CNE incompetence," as well as institutional resistance to a comprehensive international election observation effort. The Carter Center plans to send a small group of technical observers that will work with the EU EOM to monitor the security of the voting system on election day at CNE headquarters. The group will consist of seven observers: a mission leader, deputy, and five technical experts, including three from the state of Georgia. Because of the late date, the Carter Center had to scrap their plans to analyze campaign media coverage, one of the areas of Chavez' policy most criticized by the EU and OAS during the December 2005 National Assembly elections. The CNE rejected a Carter Center proposal to evaluate existing (and largely inadequate) audits of the electoral registry.

Comment

16. (C) The December 3 Venezuelan Presidential elections would have benefited from a robust international observation effort had such electoral missions begun much earlier and had they been led by internationally renowned persons able to stand up to BRV pressure. While the fact that the EU and OAS got caught up in protracted negotiations has something to do with CNE incompetence, the more relevant observation is that the two organizations fell into every one of the BRV's deliberate traps, designed to stall the arrival of the missions. The EOMs' have accepted insufficient lead time and circumscribed functions that make it effectively impossible that they will be able to mount a comprehensive and useful

observation effort. Now with less than three weeks before the presidential election, the EOMs are just barely getting into place. They have missed major decisions and tests affecting the electronic voting process and will be basing their conclusions on a incomplete, cursory snapshot of the end of the presidential campaign.

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